/35 cont./

774 upon the summit of the mountain Tabakona. They are divided
775 into groups according to their degree of power: the younger ones
754 usually travel upon mice, frogs, cats, etc., the older ones on foxes, wolves, etc. On Assumption Eve they are all obliged to gather upon the Tabakona for the annual report of their deeds to their sovereign, Roskipi, and to produce material proof of their industrious service -- a heart taken from a man or animal, a liver, eyes, nails, hair, etc. To avoid attack from witches,
[789] the Abkhaz take the following measures: during the fast of the
[785] Assumption they erect crosses and stick candles in their hair, and
[796] on the eve of the Assumption they shoot off rifles, sing, and spend the whole night in vigil. The Abkhaz believes that a witch can simultaneously be at home, among people, and on top of the mountain Tabakona. The Abkhaz explain such a splitting-up of a person by saying that it is not the witch herself that wanders about, but her accessory soul (aphschchda = superfluous soul).

2.

000 The True God -- Paganism -- The Principal and Secondary Gods of the Abkhaz -- Causes of Polytheism -- "Creators" and "Forgers" -- Fate or Predestination.

776 To assist the supreme being, endowed with all the qualities with which, according to our understanding, God is endowed, says Mr. A., Abkhaz mythology added a number of other deities, assigning to each his particular designation. These assisting deities, according to their understanding, were created by the Almighty before man and the universe came into being, and
776 people at prayer appeal through them to God himself. God
782 himself never descends to earth, but if he needs to punish someone or to grant someone his grace, he sends out one of his assistants. In the prayers which are said and sung at sacrifices and other

/38 cont./

782 unable to perform that act because of his sickness, he then
755 presents something as a pledge, saying, "If you (God) are
753 sending this (sickness) because of my guilt, then relieve me; I shall pray to you as is fitting and as the sorcerer will instruct me." But when he does not know which deity is angry and is causing his sickness, he says, "No matter what caused this illness, I shall do whatever the sorcerers may recommend." The pledge is specially set aside as a sacred object until his vow is fulfilled. The performers of prayers during such religious rituals are men or women, depending upon the sex of the deity in whose honor the ceremony is performed.

I shall proceed to a description of the ceremonies themselves.

1.

/39/

782
755 The Ceremony in Honor of Mother Earth

A sinless woman, taking six nuts and a few grains of millet, leads the sick one to an alder tree. Here she carries the three nuts and several grains of millet around the tree in the name of the earth; then she does the same thing around a nut-tree (walnut) in the name of Adabna, begging him to have pity on the sick person. She then makes
[532 a richly-dressed doll in the image of a man, buries it in
789] the earth for the "liberation" of the sick person, and says, "Play and amuse yourself with this instead of with the sick one." After this, a large millet-loaf is baked -- "the bread of Mother Earth" -- and two other long loaves of bread for Adabna. The same woman takes a piece from each of the four sides of the first loaf, both the loaves in honor of Adabna, a candle, and incense, and with the sick person goes to the crossing of three roads, where she places the pieces of the millet-loaf at one road, the two loaves of Adabna at the second, and at the third she lights the candles and places chevyaki (shoes) there, saying: "Mistress Earth, these are your shoes!" She then places the sick person on his knees

/39 cont./

782 among the articles so laid out, with a "chikila" (a kind of
755 veil) on his head, and begs, "Adgil-ankhu, Atula-ankhuse, grant him your favor! Give him firmess of head, heart, and body! Give him color, skin, and bone! Give him back the will to speak and to work! Give him strength! Deliver him from evil," etc. In the same way she also prays to Adabna. After this, she removes the chikila from the sick person with a nut-twig, raises him, strikes him on the back with a whip, and says, "Go, from this day I grant you freedom (azati)," and then both go home. At home a loaf of millet-bread is broken in two; two women each take a half and stand on the two sides of the hearth opposite each other; the sick person passes three times between them under the loaf, while one of the women exclaims, "Give me the one who has assumed the Hebrew belief," and the other, "Give me the convert to Christianity."

753 The Abkhaz is convinced that the invisible being that
755 settled in the sick man hastens immediately upon leaving him to enter someone else, and so, to help him find a new victim, they pray to him at the crossroads, where there is a continuous /40/ traffic of people, and, subsequently, a victim is always found it is unnecessary to search very long. And since an illness can be caught from a spot where a person accidentally fell or sat down, the rite of appeasing the
[823] earth must be performed on the very same spot of the falling or sitting from which the sickness originated; the doll must be buried on exactly the same spot. This is why, in order not to catch something evil from the spot where he sat down,
• [789] the Abkhaz spits three times on getting up and says, "Here stood the house and courtyard of my grandfather!"

2.

The Ceremony in Honor of the Water

782 When someone is ill for a long time with a fever, a
755 female fortune-teller is asked for advice and help; she usually
791

/41 cont./

515 782 823 [783] Fearing to defile it, the Abkhaz avoids bathing in running water; if he bathes, upon coming out /42/ of the water he takes three stones and says, "I sinned against you today; I went into the water and bathed, but you, forgive me." With this prayer, he passes the pebbles around his head with his hands and throws them into the water.

3.

The Ceremony in Honor of the Rainbow

753 [755] [782] The ceremony in honor of the rainbow, which is not obligatory for all, is performed for the greater part on persons whose sickness, according to the female fortune-teller, is caused by the rainbow. A prolonged yellowness of the face, a weakening of the organism, instability of character -- the [821] Abkhaz attributes all these to the fact that the sick person entered water at the very moment when the rainbow was drinking from it.

755 782 "Sinless" old women, having planned a sacrifice and promised a prayer, lead the sick person out to a brook; they take with them two fried capons, two stuffed loaves of unleavened bread in the shape of a tongue, and other provisions, as in the performance of the ceremony in honor of the water. On both sides of the brook, clean objects are laid out, such as clothes, silver, etc., a little bridge made of thread is thrown over the river from one bank to another. Having prepared all this, the praying-woman, with a doll that has been prepared beforehand in her hands, walks around the sick person, who is kneeling down covered with a piece of calico, and prays for him to the rainbow, known by the name Eliaphshi; then she takes a candle and addresses a similar prayer to the "Mistress Mother of the Water," and her "lord husband." After praying over the provisions she takes some [789] of each dish and throws it into the water; she places the doll in a pumpkin, and, after adorning the latter with lighted

/42 cont./

755 782 [789] candles, she lets it float down the stream, saying, "Amuse yourself with this one, instead of the sick person." Finally the old praying-woman passes her hand over the sick person's back, raises him, and having given him liberty ("azati") from his ailment, she sends him home, instructing him not to look around on his way back. The food brought to the stream is eaten on the spot by the participants in the ceremony; the remains from the table are thrown into the water and the dishes washed clean.

This prayer-ritual is considered the most sacred of all in Abkhazia, and the name of the rainbow, Atsaqva, is pronounced with great reverence. The Abkhaz claims that as [821] a consequence of this ceremony in the rainbow's honor the rain appears.

4.

/43/

782 The Prayer-Ceremony in Honor of the Wind (Phsharnha)

A large loaf of bread with cheese is prepared, placed in a basket, and carried some distance from the house. Here [776] a prayer is said to "Lady Wind" (a deity of female sex), in [827] which she is asked to bring good and to carry off evil and to [777] deliver them from all sorts of misfortunes, etc. Then the middle part of the loaf is cut out, carried into the forest, and hung on an oak tree near the top. The next day, the one who first comes near the oak tree feasts on this offering.

5.

A Prayer in Honor of a Tree

782 804 On Assumption Day, vitushki are baked according to the number of men in the family; then the master of the house, with his household, approaches any kind of young tree and, putting his foot on it, prays, "Tree, give me your blessing and happiness ... that I may safely come down

/48 cont./
753 "hung on the girls' ears." Rheumatic pains in the knees, instability of character, general weakness of the organism of a person, etc. -- all these are consequences of a
789 "weighty cause." To avert the sickness, a button is fastened to the ear like an earring. An innocent and sinless woman
755 leads the ailing person to a nut-bush and makes him kneel;
782 she drives seven /49/ sticks of nut-wood into the ground around him, fastens a lighted candle to each of them, and prays
[776] on behalf of the sick person to hanipha, the genius, walking along the rocks.

18.

Prayer in Honor of the Supreme Being

776
753 This supreme being is believed to be the cause of all kinds of sickness in man. When the body-temperature of a seriously sick person fluctuates greatly and he is alternately thrown into a fever and chills, when he faints or loses consciousness and regains it momentarily, and then begins to toss and become delirious, to sing songs, to mumble prayers, etc., the Abkhaz believe that all these severe pathological conditions are unmistakable signs of action by a superior force, by the supreme deities (Antsa r mzz) on the sick person -- "there is a divine cause." The Abkhaz are convinced that this "divine cause" has taken up its abode in the sick
755 person and therefore they say, Antsa drthoup, i.e., "a god
[787] came to visit." When the female fortune-teller confirms that the cause of the sickness is indeed that "a god took up his abode" in the sick person, then everyone in the house must assume a gay appearance and rejoice instead of grieving, for "where the god has taken up his abode, there can be nothing but rejoicing." Therefore the village youth gathers in the house of such a patient and all begin to sing and dance, and even the sick person is made to take part in the dances and singing, if he is strong enough to do so.

[782] The prayer-sacrifice is carried out near the house on the edge of a forest. The offering is a goat or a kid, a

/50 cont./

782 On the day set for the prayer, usually at the time when
233 the herds are driven into the mountains for the summer and
[796] when they return in autumn, the shepherds of the village break up into several groups, each group choosing a pretty spot in the forest near a brook or river. Some rams, according to the number of participants, are slaughtered, and the oldest shepherd of those departing for the mountains addresses Aphi, begging him to preserve them as well as their herd from the thunder-
[562] bolts. Women and children do not dare to be present at the prayers to Aphi, and women may not even pronounce his name. When talking of Aphi, the Abkhaz usually say "khakhikal" ("the one above" or "the supreme one.")

782 During a prolonged drought, a prayer with sacrifices is
731 offered in honor of Aphi. The best bull is chosen from the
789 herd and a day is set for the sacrifice. The villagers bring gomi, bread, fresh cheese, and a jug of wine. The most venerable old man holds a rope fastened to the horns of the bull; removing his cap, he pronounces the following prayer, "Oh Aphi, master of thunder, lightning, and rain! have pity on your people. Our harvests have dried up, the grass is withered, our livestock perishes from want of feed, and therefore /51/ death from hunger threatens us. Command the rain-clouds to gather, command the thunder to peal, the lightning to flash, and send us rain to save the perishing people." The participants say "Amen," and the sacrificial animal is killed and its meat cooked. After all the dishes, made from ingredients brought with him, have been pre-
[533] pared and laid out on mats, the old man who said the prayer repeats it, and then, with the singing of a hymn in praise of Aphi, the feast begins. This hymn is called Anchva rysshva
[821] and is sung in honor of Aphi, not only at feasts, but also during thunderstorms. In the first instance, it is sung with thankfulness for the gifts that are enjoyed, in the second,
782 to move Aphi to send good weather. During the feasts, one
731 of the elders usually addresses a speech to those present, re-
574 minding them that all they are then enjoying comes with the blessing of Aphi and suggesting that they thank him. Then

/57 cont./

[782] [796] [262] are made for each member of the family. The chickens must be fried and the kvakvari baked before cockcrow. Just after the first cockcrow the master of the house puts bowls on the table, into each of which he puts a chicken and four kvakvari; to each one he fastens a wax candle. A brazier with coals is placed near the table. All the members of the family kneel down around the table, each opposite his bowl, [789] and the eldest person in the family, after removing his cap and throwing incense in the brazier, asks God to preserve him and his family from stomach disorders. After the prayer, all rise, turn to the right, and bow to the east; then everyone eats his portion, and each does his best to finish the meal without fail before dawn.

[796] [262] On New Year's Eve, after supper, a prayer is again offered in each family to ask for all sorts of blessings. For this occasion a rectangular pie is prepared, stuffed with cheese; this is put on a board to which a wax candle is fastened. The whole family kneels around it, and the eldest in the clan throws incense on the coals and says the prayer; then the pie is eaten and the leftovers burned on the coals. This prayer is called Kalinda. On the first day of the New Year the prayer called Gunykhva (prayer of the heart) is [262] offered. For this, a small loaf of wheat-bread stuffed with an egg is prepared for each member of the family. The head of [789] the family raises a loaf to the breast of each member, praying to God to preserve them from heart ailments. After the prayer, each one eats his loaf.

24.

Drought

[731] [789] During a severe summer drought all the village girls gather in their best attire near the river. They divide themselves into three groups and make a raft of branches, cover this with straw, and make a doll, which they then dress up as a /58/ woman. When all these preparations are finished, a

/58 cont./

731 donkey is brought, which they cover with a white sheet and
789 put the doll on it. One of the girls takes the donkey by the rein, while two others support the doll, and they set out for the place where the raft was made. The other girls accompany the procession on both sides, singing "dziva dziva
[539] dzvari! Kva kva mykryld aphsh-akh ipha did shivait dzy khychik, dzy khuchik," which means, "To get water, water! To get rainwater; a red daisy! Son of the Lord, we thirst for a little water, a little water!" When they come to the river, they take the doll from the donkey, put it on the raft, and, setting the straw afire, let it float downstream; they then try to chase the donkey into the water, which, of course, requires no small effort. At last the donkey is dragged into the river, and, emerging on the opposite bank, he begins
[825] to bray, which is considered the surest sign of forthcoming rain. If, however, the donkey fails to bray, the same ceremony is repeated anew on the following day or the next day after that.

25.

Saints

776 Independent of the general worship of all the deities dis-
778 cussed above, the inhabitants of the villages of Lykhny,
[184] Lzaa, and Ilori are under the protection of saints, to whom the churches erected in those villages are dedicated; or, more correctly, who are under the protection of the churches themselves. In Lykhny each family invokes the protection of Anan-Lykhnykh (the Virgin Mother of Lykhny), in Lzaa, of Anan-Lzaanykh (the Virgin Mother of Lzaa, i.e., the cathedral of Pitsunda dedicated to the Holy Virgin), in Ilori, of Tsminda Giorgi (the cathedral of St. George). To invoke
782 their protection, sacrifices must be offered, which are, in
[796] fact, brought by each family once a year on a Sunday evening.

[231] On the day set aside for the offering, the best year-old

[770 cont.]

231 (atlar-tšoup'), they lay the animal on a quickly erected, three-
[782] meter-high framework or in a tree. The owner sacrifices an ox and prays to be spared in the future; then they eat the meat of the sacrificial animal, bread, and cheese, drink wine, and feast
766 the entire day. The Abkhaz proceed in the same way for a person struck by lightning, but no one may weep lest the god become angry (see p. 87).

• 789 During drought one also turns to Ap'i to send rain; an
[787] ox is sacrificed, and at the feast songs of thanks and praise (antšva-ryšša) are sung in alternating chant. In order to evoke rain magic similar to that customarily practiced among the Balkan peoples is used (cf. also p. 64). The girls from the village stricken with drought place a female doll embodying the drought on a donkey and lead it to the river; here they put the doll on a raft made of twigs and straw, ignite it, and allow it to drift. They pull the donkey by force through the water, and if he brays, there will be rain.

755 Various gods are called upon in case of illness. Ague,
[753] delirium, and the like accompanying serious illness are attributed to the presence of the supreme god (Antsar mz) in the body of the sufferer. In order to cure him, they sing and dance about him
[784] and even force him to do the same; then they sacrifice bread and a goat or sheep in the vicinity of the house, during which no woman may be present; an old man with a candle circles the sick person and pleads with the god to forgive him and deliver him. He also prays afterwards to Michael-Gabriel.

In case of fever they look for help from the "Mother of
[776] the Waters"; she lives, according to them, in a clear lake or spring, is beautiful, has brown hair and laughing eyes, and likes to live for a while with a man, like the mermaids. An old woman touches the water with some object belonging to the feverish person and begs the goddess to release him if she has enthralled him. Then she ladles up a few drops of water on some alder-leaves and holds them over the fire in the house so that the fever may leave as quickly as the water on the leaves. Finally the old woman moves away quickly, with the wish that the fever, too,

[770 cont.]

755 might leave. As soon as the afflicted person is able, he himself goes to the water with a prayer-woman; there he kneels and
[782] offers up a hen to the mother of the waters, a rooster to her husband, and a candle to each of them and to her female servant (Abza 'avabzatšav = benefactress, intercessor). The woman prays and strokes the sick person on the back for "deliverance" (azati).

If someone suffers from jaundice or debility, [771] the "irreproachable" elders lead him to the river, lay his clothing, silver articles, etc. on both banks, and make a bridge of twisted yarn over the river; the prayer-woman then circles the sick person with a doll and prays to the rainbow in the name of the Eliap'ši, to the mother of the waters, and to her husband. She
[782] casts into the water pieces of the food that was brought along: roasted chickens, tongue-shaped flat cakes, etc., and she allows the doll to float downstream in a gourd with a burning candle, while she prays that the goddess amuse herself with it rather than with the sick person. Finally she gives the latter "deliverance," and he may not look back on the way home (cf. p. 924 f. [untranslated]).

231 When rinderpest struck, the Kemirkehe used to dig a
●789 tunnel in a steep river-bank and in the middle of this a pit in which they fastened a black cat with a silver belt. They covered the pit with boards and earth, ignited a fire on top by rubbing two sticks together, and drove the cattle through the river and the tunnel, to the accompaniment of the priests' litany. Afterwards the cat was freed.

842 The above-mentioned threefold prayer at the water is aimed at fertility when one "leads to the water" a young woman
844 for the first time, during which an egg is thrown in, and, in the case of a woman in childbed, food for the infant.

787 The Abkhaz read signs for future events, for a favorable
[821] or unfavorable outcome for undertakings, from the stars, from the form of the moon, from meeting certain animals or human beings, and also, in the manner of the Tatars, from the cracks in a sheep's shoulder-blade that has been cast into the fire (see Vol. II, p. 325).

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzha

Àmza, the great part of the great god *Àyt'ar*, guard over our men! Grant them beauty and strength!" Simultaneously the men-folk crowd around him, for the moon is the god of men; the women-folk stand at a distance. "Increase our cattle and all our weal! Burn out the eyes of the spell-binders, and the tongues of the evil-speakers! *Wootsw*, *Wootsw*!" the supplicant continues his incantation and, calling to the cattle, spills *k'uarpa* (*a-k'warpà* or *a-k'wərpà*) now in the direction of the sea, now towards the mountains.

"The moon is a man, and the sun is a woman," say the Abkhasians.

I will now quote from my notes the following brief account of a very characteristic Abkhasian tale:

(1) "Seven very rich Abkhasian brothers had no sisters; whereat they were very aggrieved. Eventually, however, a sister was born, but from that moment the wealth of the brothers began to diminish; every night some invisible power drove away their cattle in herds. The youngest brother who was endowed with the gift of prescience (*ashàna*) said to the others: 'A demon has entered our house in the guise of our sister; if we do not kill him, our days and those of all in the whole district are numbered!' The brothers, however, would not listen to him. Thereupon he left his home, and travelled abroad, where he married a beautiful maiden-sun (*Àmra*). After several years, feeling home-sick, he set out to visit his brothers. Alas! what did he find? There was nobody left alive in the whole district except a mouse and his own sister-demon (the witch). She at once devoured his horse, and stepped aside to sharpen her teeth. On the advice of the mouse, the moon-brother, to save his life, took to his heels; he managed to inform his wife-sun of his misfortune, who hastened to deliver him. But the sister overtook her brother and began to devour him. By this time his wife Àmra had arrived. She pulled her husband, *Àmza*, towards her, but the demon pulled also; and so a deadlock ensued. *Antswà* decided the matter thus: he allowed the wife-sun to have her husband, the moon, for fifteen days, and the demon to have him for the remaining fifteen days of the month. And from that time began the phases of the moon. As soon as the moon becomes full it means that the demon has begun to devour Àmza, on which account the moon diminishes gradually; towards the end of Àmza's life his wife, full of love, comes to the rescue of her unfortunate husband, and as her caresses and care restore him to life the moon waxes again. When it is full the demon reappears and the story repeats itself!"

(2) "The Eclipse of the Moon. During the eclipse a monster, Atv (*Atwyə*), falls upon the moon to devour it. In order to save their

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzha

539 benefactor, the moon, the Abkhasians fire at the monster and thereby
[789] drive him away." [1]

(3) The Moon and the Sun. A beautiful Abkhasian widow woman had a son and a daughter, who often absented themselves from home for the whole day; they would go off early in the morning and return only late in the evening. No amount of coaxing or tenderness on the part of the mother sufficed to keep the children at home or stop them from indulging in their daily adventure, so she decided to shadow them. She found they were seated under the shadow of an ancient oak, in a thick forest, enjoying themselves in an agreeable pastime with the moon and the sun. Before them were all sorts of eatables. The mother, flying into a passion, flung fresh dung at the moon and the sun. The sun-sister, being a more fastidious creature, washed herself, but the less particular moon-brother did not do so, and hence arose the dark patches on the moon; the brother, the moon, and the sister, the sun,[2] then soared up to the sky for ever, while the widow and her children returned home."

821 Here I will also note that the Abkhasians always welcome the new moon by looking at its reflection through a mirror, or over a silver piece.

[753] A certain mainly infantile disease, similar to convulsions, is called by the Abkhasians *ámzakra*, i.e. " to be caught by the moon ".

(*e*) *Àmra-nə̀hwa*, Prayer to the Sun.

1796 When he has finished the invocation addressed to Àmza (the
[716] moon), the supplicant takes the sun-shaped cake, and, with the women surrounding him, he says: " Thou, Àmra, *Àyt'ar iniswakhwədə̀*, the great part of the great *Àyt'ar*, grant warmth, and caress the women of our family! Increase our cattle," etc., and then spills *k'warpə* (*a-k'warpə̀*) in the usual manner, uttering *wootsw*.

According to D. I. Gulia, in the village of Dchilou they use the form *Amera* instead of *Àmra*.

(*f*) *Andə̀p'a-nàga*.

[716] After that the supplicant takes *alakwàra* (a large mortar) and, addressing himself to the god *Andə̀p'a-nàga*, says: " Thou, the great part of the great god *Àyt'ar*, send us the warmth of thine eyes and of

[1] Exactly what *Atswyə* denotes is difficult to explain. In connection with the
[92] above quoted tale, the etymology of this word may, however, perhaps elucidate its significance. *Atə̀* denotes the barn- or screech-owl; *wy* may be the root from the word *a-owyə̀* (man); consequently *atswyə* may denote " man-owl ". And by *atswyə* is, perhaps, understood the sister devouring the brother-moon.

[2] Their gender is often confused: sometimes the moon and the sun are sisters or brothers, sometimes the moon is brother and the sun sister.

[3] I think the Georgian word *mizezi*, cause, is derived from the Abkhasian *amezə*, cause (from *ámza*, moon). (It is doubtful! Ed. *Khrist. Vost.*)

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzha

himself, by placing before the "icon" also the amount he was to pay to the opponent.

Muhammadans also take the propitiatory oath at Ilori, together with the Christians.[1]

There are many stories current about the power of the Ilori "icon" to work miracles. I learned one of them from the lips of Biram Tkhazou and Seyt Zhania.

"In ancient times the Ilori 'icon' determined all the disputes of human mortals in the following manner. High up in the centre of the church, hung the golden scales of Justice. Under these scales stood the suitors, praying zealously to the Ilori 'icon', who inclined the scale over the head of the righteous. Knowing this, Abkhasians would not venture to break the law or wrong one another; peace and happiness reigned upon the earth. But men are cunning; an impious Abkhaz decided to deceive the great Ilori 'icon'. He owed a neighbour of his a hundred *manat'i* (= rubles) which he would not pay. The creditor complained. They both went to Ilori. When they appeared before the 'icon', the debtor handed to his creditor his staff which contained the hundred *manat'i*. The scale inclined towards the creditor, thus acquitting him of the charge. He took back his staff and left the church. The Ilori 'icon' was 'offended' and because of this fraudulence on the part of one Abkhaz it punished the entire people: the 'icon' took the scales of Justice to heaven for ever."

In ancient times the Ilori "icon" provided oxen for itself on the eve of the wake festival. The Commission assured me that eye-witnesses of this miracle were still living in Abkhasia, but none knew their names. As this providing of the oxen is described by A. Lamberti in the manner in which the Abkhasians relate it to-day, I will quote the description from his work.[2]

"On November 20th[3] they celebrate St. George's Day. A superstition prevails among the people that this celebrated martyr, on this day, procures for himself an ox from the neighbourhood and brings it by night into the Ilori Church dedicated to him. This church is held in great esteem, not only by all the Megrels, but by the neighbouring peoples also. Therefore it is very rich in gold and silver[4]—the icons are all made of these metals and are adorned, too, with precious stones; and even the doors are mounted in thick sheets of silver. So revered is this church by all the people, that, although situated

[1] In Northern Abkhasia *Dadsvap'sh* is endowed with a similar power.

[2] A. Lamberti lived as a missionary for eighteen years in Megrelia (1635–1653), and, according to him (and also to other sources), the present-day southern Abkhasia (Abzhua) constituted then part of Megrelia, the northern boundary being the River Kodor.

[3] The 10th of our (old) style.—N. J.

[4] At the present time, too, it is the wealthiest and the most influential of all the churches of Abkhasia.—N. J.

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzha

in a distant country place and near the sea-coast, thieves have never entered there, nor has any enemy ship raided it or despoiled it of its wealth. Indeed, so highly is this saint (the Ilori 'icon') honoured, that not only would the valuable contents of the church not be stolen, but, even if precious stones were scattered *outside* the church, in its vicinity, no one would touch them. (It is the same even to-day, N.J.) In addition to the local population, this saint is also feared by the Abkhazes,[1] and even by the Turks, deprived though they are of the light of Christian religion. They all worship, and fear, this sacred object (the 'icon', N.J.) . . .

"On November 20th, the Prince (of Megrelia, N.J.) goes to the Ilori Church accompanied by his court officials, nobles, and the people of Odishi (i.e. Megrelia), to participate in the feast of the 'ox'. Not only do the Odishians go there on that day, but also the Abkhazes and Svans, in great numbers. The church is enclosed in stone walls about the height of fifteen spans. At its entrance are large gates surmounted by a beautiful campanile containing many bells. On the eve of the feast, in the dusk of the evening, the Prince, accompanied by a large retinue of bishops, princes, and nobles, rides up to these gates, orders them to be locked, then seals the keyhole with his own seal and returns home. The following morning, before dawn, the Prince, accompanied by the same retinue, again rides up to the gates. When they have assured themselves that the seal has not been tampered with, the Prince removes the seal and opens the gates. Within the Church walls, the ox is found. At the sight of this miracle, the people, with great fervour, offer up their thanks to St. George, and the church bells ring out the glad tidings of the miracle all over the country-side. Everyone is firmly convinced that St. George himself provided the ox and led it with his own hands into the enclosure. Also, it is said, the saint leads the ox thrice from the mountains to the sea and back, and offers the ox, thus sanctified, to the people as a gift . . .

"A long time ago, so it is said, an unbeliever (the Abkhazes say that he was a Muslim from Trebizond, N.J.) came here from a country many hundreds of miles away from Odishi. After witnessing the miracle and how the people celebrated the occasion, this obstinate man not only disbelieved, but began to mock the Christians, telling them that they were light-minded and foolish enough to believe anything. In spite of his attitude, the people tried to persuade him to embrace the true Faith of Christ, and unanimously affirmed that all the miracles of St. George were really true. 'Very well, then,' said he, 'I will do this. At my home, two hundred miles away, I have an

[1] In Ilori the Megrelian language prevails to this day; many, however, know Abkhasian also.—N.J.

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzha

ox of a certain colour. If the miracles you talk so much about are true, it should be an easy matter for St. George to bring my ox into this church to-night; then, certainly, I will gladly embrace your Faith.' The condition was accepted. On the following morning, early, on opening the gates, there was found within the enclosure an ox which the unbeliever recognized as his own. Thus he was convinced of his error, and embraced the Christian Faith."[1]

(c) *Indl-qwùba.*

The *T'avadi*-s Marshania, and all those Abkhasians who descended from the mountains (Dsabalaa, Dalaa, Pskhvu, etc.), offer sacrifices (a ram, without fail) in exactly the same manner to a sanctity, *Indl-qwùba*, instead of to the Ilori "icon". I could obtain no information of any kind about this "icon". Everybody I questioned gave the same answer: *Indl-qwùba* is equal in power to *Dədərəp'sh* and the Ilori "icon".

These offerings are performed early in the morning, and serve as breakfasts. Every Abkhaz slaughters some animal for the meal (the favourite one is a castrated goat), it is often prepared on the Saturday. They also pay the customary Paschal visits. After the midday sacrificial meal they all go to the public square, where they indulge in games, chiefly football. During Easter week they also organize horse racing, the most popular sport of the Abkhasians.

7. *The Second Day of Easter*

This is a commemoration day. A variety of dishes are prepared, all of which are placed on a table by an open window. The eldest of the family, holding a candle and a glass of wine in his hands, prays to the souls of deceased relatives that they grant his family peace and happiness. Then follows the pouring of wine on the meat and wheat dishes. The whole family stand behind the supplicant. After the prayer each member approaches, places a piece of frankincense on burning embers, and pours wine on the food. Here stands too a smoking pipe. All remain seated in silence, in order that the souls of the deceased ancestors may eat in peace.[2]

The Abkhasian, as has already been stated, have no Paschal greeting such as "Christ is risen". They welcome each other with a kiss, saying: "May God grant us that we meet again next year," to which the other replies: "And for a hundred years."

[1] Quoted from the Russian and Georgian translation of A. Lamberti's *Relationi della Colchide hoggi detta Mengrelia nella qualle si tratta dell'Origine, costumi e Costi naturali di quei Paesi.* Published in Naples, 1654.

[2] This rite will be described in detail in my work *The Cult of the Ancestors.*

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzhq

8. *Thursday of Easter Week*

(*dsatchòkhur, mardyàni t'argyalàz*)

796 On the Thursday of Easter week the Abkhasians offer a sacrifice [796] to *dsatchòkhur, mardyàni t'argyalàz*. I do not know what the first word denotes. *Mardyàni* is the Megrelian *mardiani* (Geo. *madliani*) and denotes "beneficent", "blessed", "abundant"; while *t'argyalàz* is derived from the Georgian word *mt'avar-angelozi*, archangel; it is not clear, however, which of the archangels is meant. According to the explanation of the Commission, this "icon" punishes the offending family by causing the death, in particular, of children. "If there are children in the family, it does not touch the adults," commented the Commission. Sacrifice to this "icon" is always offered by an oak tree. On the Thursday, early in the morning, sacrificial cakes are baked, and the whole family repair to their oak, which is usually situated nearby within the enclosure. Everybody kneels, [789] facing eastward, and the head of the family makes a bloodless offering consisting of *akwakwàr* and cakes, and entreats the great Dsatchkhur, the beneficent T'argialaz, to forgive them their trespasses, voluntary or involuntary. *Àämen* say the whole family. The oak tree is decorated [824] with pieces of many coloured stuffs, some fastened with nails and [778] some with wax. This oak is sacred and to fell, damage, or defile it is strictly forbidden.

On the same day, in the evening, but this time at home, the family [788] make a blood offering to *T'argyalàz*. A fattened capon is immolated and cakes are again baked. Some families keep pitchers with "sacrificial wine" in his honour.

"In ancient times when people were not so depraved, T'argialaz procured for the day of offering a wild he-goat as his victim," Osman [789] Kamkia informed me, "just as the Ilori 'icon' procured an ox. Now he no longer does so, for we are not worthy of his favours!" concluded the old man, sighing. The peasants Kamkia are *me-khat-ur-n-i* (Geo.), i.e. "attendants of the 'icon'." They keep a little cottage (*p'atskha*) [778] where the "god" is supposed to dwell invisibly. A money-box is kept in the cottage, into which the faithful drop copper coins used exclusively for the purchase of sacrificial offerings.

An old Megrelian, whose name has unfortunately become effaced in my note-book, told me the following:—

778 "The all-powerful and miraculous icon, Dsatchkhur, was removed 789 by the Svans from the Salkhino church, and taken to Svanet'i, where it remained for a long time; in the end, however, moved by pity for the Megrelians, the icon returned of its own accord and alighted on an oak which stands on the picturesque hill of Salkhino. Near this

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzha

oak the Megrelians built a church in its honour, in which this icon rests to this day. It has not forgotten the Svans whom it often visits." My Megrelian informant is an inhabitant of Salkhino.

9. *Àhwrsa-rə̀mshap'*

Abkhasians call the first Sunday after Easter Low Sunday, *Àhwrsa-rə̀mshap'*, i.e. Pascha for women. This day is set apart for public games. Early in the morning everybody assembles in the public square where they indulge in all sorts of sport, chiefly, however, horse racing and tournaments. Next day the Abkhasians go back to work, and ordinary life is resumed.

The public games (on holidays) are continued till Whit Monday.

10. *Àdsyla-nə̀hwa*

In connection with *Àmshap'* mention may be made of two supplications, *Àdsyla-nə̀hwa* (cf. III (*d*)) and "*Supplication of the Leybaa*". I have not been lucky enough to have witnessed the latter ceremony, which, by the way, belongs to a cult of the Bzib Abkhasians.[1] The worship of the tree, so picturesquely described by ancient writers, such as Strabo, Procopius of Cæsarea, is preserved in a most conspicuous form with its sacred grove, in this supplication of the Leybaa *gvari*, as is also the name of the deity, in that of *Àdsyla-nə̀hwa*; *Àdsyla* denotes tree, *nə̀hwa* (*anə̀hwara*), praying, supplication. The deity of the tree itself is called *Àdsyla-intswakhwə̀*, wherein the latter part denotes "his (of the male rational being) part of god, deity". The Abkhasians in their religion personify and "intellectualize" all manifestations of life, and they strictly distinguish the gender of each of them.

In order to protect wanton children who roam about without restraint, and love to climb trees, the Abkhasians make offerings to the "spirit of the tree", entreating the "great part of the deity of the tree" to guard their children against falling off trees and hurting themselves. The objects offered are capon and cakes. The oak (*a-j*) they consider as the sacred tree, to which they make the offering; walnut-trees (particularly the hazel-nut-tree) and yoke-elms are "pure" trees. If someone falls from the tree they must dig up some coal from under the spot where the person fell; if no coal is found, the accident is regarded as serious; and the person will not survive the fall. An offering is also made to the "spirit of the tree" in the case of certain illnesses, as directed by sorceresses, the sick person being supposed to have fallen ill through having incurred the wrath of the spirit.

[1] About this see the article by N. Pateyna, in the *Collaborator of the Transcaucasian Mission* (in Russian), 1912, pp. 107–112, 124–7.

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
AdzVibzhq

Wednesday was the day of the prayer to the tree spirit, with both the Abkhasians and the K'art'vels (and Megrels),[1] which is partly confirmed by the Megrelian name of this day, i.e. *jumashkha*; the latter consists of *juma* and *shkha* (Geo. *dghe*). What does the first component word denote? May it not be derived from the Abkhasian word *ajəma*, she-goat? The Pshavs have preserved the more salient *jumaghis jvari*, wherein *jumaghi* = *ajəmagh* denoting "goat-seed, goat-male", he-goat. This term may have been obtained from the custom of the Abkhasians of dedicating, or offering, exclusively, a goat to the tree spirit. This supposition finds further confirmation in the legend of Dsatchkhur, which procured exclusively for its festivals the wild goat (male).

One may also note the concordance between the names of some days in the Megrelian language, and the fact that it is just on these days that the cult is observed of those gods to whom these days are dedicated. Thus on the Monday (*t'ut'ashkha*) the Abkhasians offer a sacrifice to the moon; on the Wednesday (*jumashkha*) they observe the cult of the tree, and on the Tuesday (*t'ashkashkha*) the cult of the mother-earth.[2]

III. Nàn-ĥwa

The Abkhasians call the day of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin (15th August) (*a*) *Nàn-ĥwa*.[3] They observe with great reverence both *Nàn-ĥwa* and the Lent of the Assumption. With *Nàn-ĥwa* are connected the following superstitions of the Abkhasians:—

(*a*) *Àwyəst'ad-ĥkhara* (Meg. *Dchindchat'oba*)

Abkhasians associate the night before the 1st August with increased activity on the part of evil spirits *dwyəst'ad*, demons; and

[1] N. Janashia evidently here uses *K'art'vel* as a generic term, including Megrels, but etymologically and linguistically such use of the term is definitely inadmissible. (Ed. *Khrist. Vost.*)

[2] The last two comparisons are made by the author, because for *jumashkha* he had also another etymology in connection with the Abkhasian *a-j*, oak, with which he identifies the Megrelian *ja*, tree; while in the first part (*t'akha-*) of the word *t'akhashkha*, he saw the Megrelian *dikha*, earth, soil. These doubtful etymologies have been eliminated. On the other hand, cf. *nertchi*, in I. Kipshidze's *Grammar of the Megrelian Language*, s.v., where this term is interpreted as "the basis of something, or the ground on which a house stands", and since the prayer dedicated to *nertchi*, or "master, lord" *nertchi*, as to a kind of deity, cannot be performed in a house with a wooden floor, I. Kipshidze concluded "that *nertchi* is god of the earth", in which supposition he was to a certain extent supported by definitions of the same word, given by lexicographers (S. S. Orbeliani: "the external side of the bottom"; Tchubinov (I): "bottom, the lower part of a vessel"; Tchub (II): "the lower part of the vessel, of the pitcher"). These materials N. Janashia supplements in his letter, dated 16th April, thus: "In Imeret'i *nertchi* denotes ceiling (see also V. Beridze, *Sitqvishona*, The Dictionary, s.v.), while in Megrelia, on the other hand, the rite is known under the name of *p'udzezhi do nertchish khvema*, 'the praying of the foundation and ceiling' if not 'of the floor'." (Ed. *Khrist. Vost.*)

[3] In my opinion *Nan(as)* denotes mother, and *ĥwa*, "says" (from *aĥwara*, see above, p. 124, note 2), that is, "for the mother," "the mother's day."

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzhq

they, therefore, take precautionary measures to avoid becoming victims of the malignant will of the evil spirits. Nothing is left outside the house, or in the courtyard; nobody sleeps out of doors. To safeguard themselves from evil spirits, the superstitious attach pieces of wax to their hair. Crosses are made from *a-lakwə̀mha* (Geo. *lekumkha*),[1] to which are appended acanthus leaves, and these are placed at the courtyard gates, house doors, the gates of the kitchen gardens and cornfields, the poultry and cow-houses, etc. Acanthus leaves are hung around the necks of the domestic animals. The Abkhaz is convinced that *dwyəst'aă* dare not approach these crosses, which are also a protection against evil eyes.

During this night the evil spirits go out to look for booty, under the leadership of their mother, *Arapàp* (Meg. *rokapi*). On this expedition they are joined by human beings in whom evil spirits have taken their abode. Some of these evil spirits ride wolves or cats, and devour all the animals left outside by their owners who had no time, or had forgotten to drive them into shelter.[2] All evil spirits without exception stir abroad during this night; they wander growling from village to village and through the forests. For this reason it is easy to find out and catch them, and with this object youths go into the woods, where they make a large fire, using the wood of *a-lakwə̀mha*. The youngsters hide behind the bushes and watch out to see if they can recognize those of their neighbours into whom an evil spirit has entered. It is believed that the demons never pass a bonfire without stopping and warming themselves a little by it. Often quarrels arise on this ground, with unpleasant consequences. This custom of seeking after the evil spirits, "demons," is called *Awyəst'aă lə̀khəra*, which denotes "the catching of the demon"; it is also known under the Megrelian name of *dchindchat'oba*. To this day an Abkhaz believes that an evil spirit can enter into, and remain in, a human body, particularly in that of an old woman.

The chief *dwyəst'aă* is the eldest son of the sister of God, and that is why He, being a blood relation, cannot destroy him, although he may frighten him off with thunder. Here it will be appropriate to quote the following popular story:—

"At the time of the partition of the work between God and the devil, the former, exercising the right of seniority,[3] suggested to the devil that they should divide the world between them. The latter

[1] The Russian *krushina*, according to the botanists of the Sukhum Botanical Garden, that is, *alaternus* (R. Eristov mentions the plant *lekukha*, but he does not explain it. Ed. *Khrist. Vost.*).

[2] To safeguard an animal from wild beasts when he strays in the forest, they "bind the mouth" of the wild animals as follows: a pair of scissors is tied and a suitable prayer is uttered. "A sure remedy."

[3] The younger divides, and the elder chooses.

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzha

agreed. During the night God caused the earth to be covered with luxuriant vegetation. Captivated by the beauty of vegetation the devil suggested to God that the best way to divide the world between them would be for one to have the earth and the other the vegetation. God took as his share the earth, and the devil received the vegetation. God then ordered him to remove his vegetation immediately. Only now did the devil realize his mistake, which, however, he rectified thus: he restored the vegetation to God, and in return for it he begged and obtained from Him the right to the souls of those who fall from the trees, having climbed them without first praying to God for their safety. . . ."

(*b*) *Barbanjia* (*dchiakokona*)

Before sunset on the 14th August the Abkhasian youths light, in their respective courtyards, a fire of flax straw (at present, owing to the lack of this straw, they use dry fern, etc.). Each person leaps thrice through the flame of this fire, shouting " I have burnt the evil spirit; I have burnt the evil spirit ". By so leaping through the flame an Abkhaz " purifies " himself of the evil spirit. After they have leapt three times through the flame each throws a piece of salt into the burning fire, and then, altogether, they begin to beat the fire with sticks to extinguish it, at the same time shouting the above quoted words. At the conclusion of the whole operation, the neighbours inform each other of their victory over the evil spirit by firing a gun. This manner of destroying the evil spirits is called " the burning of the demon " or *Barbanjia*. The denotation of the word is incomprehensible to me.[1]

(*c*) *Nân-ĥwa*

On the day of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin, the " pure " (eldest) woman in the family prepares *a-tcha* (" a round bread stuffed with cheese "), boils a cock, and leads the whole family into the kitchen garden. Here they all kneel in front of the blossoming cucumber vine, and the eldest woman makes offering to Nan, saying: " the great Nan (*Nân-du*)! We who offer thee this sacrifice, established by our ancestors, humbly entreat thee to have mercy upon our house: increase it like the stars in the sky! " etc. The kneeling family repeat with her, *Âmen*. But no one knows who *Nan* (*Anan*) is; they only know that she is a goddess of procreation of the human race. Of the Mother of God there is no knowledge whatever.

[1] The Georgian equivalent is *Dchiakokona*, which is observed on Ash-Wednesday. *Dchiakokona*, according to Tchubinov, denotes " the leaping through the fire on Wednesday of Passion-week ".